

Could the capital's 13 municipalities co-operate more closely?

A long-awaited review of integrated services in the capital region, which the province offered in response to calls for amalgamation, has been released.

While the report does not review amalgamation, it identifies areas where Greater Victoria's 13 municipalities are already working together, as well as opportunities for more co-operation.

“This is not a study of municipal amalgamation, although it is designed to provide information that could inform subsequent interest of some municipalities in discussions on amalgamation,” the report says.

The report highlights variations in service sharing and delivery in areas like policing, fire, water, recreation and housing.

It paints a picture of a region that co-operates well in some areas — pointing to the move toward a shared emergency dispatch services — and operates independently in others.

There's a need for higher-level co-ordination in some areas like transportation, it says, which is currently co-ordinated on an ad-hoc basis between local governments, the Capital Regional District and province.

Regional identities inform ideas about amalgamation and integrated services. While the push for amalgamation is strongest in Victoria, members of the West Shore feel lost in the discussion of core-area issues and see regional approaches as expensive.

The report makes several recommendations, presented as optional guidelines that local governments can follow, rather than requirements.

They include building on regional service initiatives already in progress;

creating a consistent way to discuss service and governance integration through the formation of things like a leaders forum; and evaluating new opportunities for service integration.

Former Liberal cabinet minister George Abbott's company — Circle Square Consulting — and Urban Systems won a \$95,000 bid to work with the 13 capital region governments to “explore ways to integrate services and governance.”

The idea of studying some form of amalgamation was put to the electorate in eight of the 13 municipalities in the November 2014 municipal election.

Seventy-five per cent of voters supported the idea.

more to come